



Encouraging Check Ins & Working Towards Straight Line Travel

Introduction

One of the first things we worked on with our puppies was teaching them to make eye contact with us when we say their name. We are now going to build on that behavior and use it as a means of keeping them focused while we are walking on leash. If we can maintain our puppy's focus, we can start to increase the distance we can walk in a straight line.

What is a “Check In?”

A “check in” is when our puppy voluntarily makes momentary eye contact with us, we mark that behavior with a “Yes,” and we reward with a treat. It's a great way to let you puppy know that they are doing well.

Initially, our puppies need to be encouraged to check in with us. We can do that by saying their name and marking and rewarding as soon as they look at us. By repeating this frequently and in a variety of environments, your puppy will learn that checking in with you earns them your attention and a treat, so after a while, they will start to do this voluntarily.

How to Start Adding Check Ins to Your Loose Leash Walking

In previous exercises you will have progressed to walking with your puppy for durations of up to a minute in a few different environments. Up until now we have been using changes of direction to maintain our puppy's focus when they start to become distracted. However, as we progress with their training and socialization, those changes of direction are not always practical. Imagine trying to navigate the grocery store with frequent direction changes! So, we are going to use check ins as a tool for facilitating straight line travel.



- ☐ Stage 1 - In a low distraction environment (this can be inside or outside your home) start by walking 5 steps or so and then saying your puppy's name. To begin with you might need to use a more exciting tone than your normal speaking voice to get their attention. As soon as your puppy looks at you, mark with a clear "Yes!" and reward them. Take another 5 steps and repeat. Do 4 or 5 repetitions in each training session.
- ☐ Stage 2 - Try this in a couple of other environments, gradually increasing the level of distractions. For example:
 - ✦ Start on your driveway.
 - ✦ Then move to the street right outside your home.
 - ✦ Then a local park.
 - ✦ Then outside Target, or a school, or the mall.
- ☐ Stage 3 - Once you have practiced this a few times with your puppy in different environments, you will start to notice that they are initiating check-ins without you asking for them in hope of getting a reward. When this starts happening, it is really important that a) you notice it happening, and b) that you continue to mark and reward. Then your puppy knows they have done something good and they keep doing it. If you are not getting check-ins as frequently as you would like, you can mix and match their voluntary check-ins with you using their name.
- ☐ Stage 4 - As your puppy matures you can also use check-ins as a means for dealing with distractions. If you notice their attention is starting to wander, you can use their name to ask for a check-in before they get the opportunity to get fully distracted and lunge, bark, or offer some other undesirable behavior.

Setting Up For Success

- ✦ Once your puppy is offering check-ins without you saying their name, you need to make sure you are paying attention so you can mark and reward the behavior so they keep doing it!



- ✿ You may find that your puppy is offering check ins in a low distraction environment, but you need to still use their name in new or high distraction environment. This is perfectly normal and it's OK to go back a stage if you need to when you are in new environments or unpredictable surroundings.
- ✿ Make sure you are rewarding your puppy in heel position on your left side:

[Video - Leash Handling & Treat Delivery - Hints & Tips](#)